

# Grand history, old-time comfort stamp a N.H. hotel

By Sarah Schweitzer

GLOBE STAFF

JACKSON, N.H. — The Eagle Mountain House is one of New England's longest-lived grand Victorian hotels. Like its cousins, the Mount Washington Resort at Bretton Woods and The Balsams Grand Resort Hotel, it is a sturdy, dignified place, with dark wood paneling, leather couches, portraits of earnest men, and a mighty veranda.

But for all the grandeur and history, the Eagle Mountain House promotes itself as homey. My friend Kristen was quick to agree. "It reminds me of Grandma's house," she said as we sat down to breakfast on a Saturday in early autumn.

I wasn't so sure. In the formal dining room, with its velvet drapes, forest-green walls, and antique chandeliers, I wondered whether I should be dabbing the corners of my mouth with a napkin and concentrating on keeping my elbows off the table. I imagined the generations of well-to-do Bostonians who had traveled to this perch in the White Mountains come summertime, their society manners and refined ways transported from the sweltering city they could afford to escape.

They would have been dabbing, I was certain.

"More coffee, dear?" our waitress asked, dropping the "R" in perfect New Hampshire-speak. She shared with us that the foreign workers had gone home with high season just about over. It was just the locals working now. The woman cheerfully making waffles in the buffet line gushed about how she was leaving the next day for a vacation in the upper reaches of Maine's Aroostook County.

The banter continued casual and convivial, unrestrained by formality. Later, as we strolled the grounds, we realized that modern hotel basics are little observed here. We saw not a row of track lighting. Rooms are not air-conditioned. Doorways are narrow and crystal knobs are wobbly. Hallway floors creak and slope. The hotel opted to let imperfections be.

Antiques seem organic in this setting. I felt perfectly natural to ride a Portland



PHOTOS BY LAURIE SWOPE/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The look of the Eagle Mountain House in Jackson, N.H., preserves an early 20th-century idea of genteel vacationing.

desk, it would not have surprised.

"She is a grand dame who has no pretensions about her age," said Jerry Jacobson, the inn's general manager.

The hotel's history dates to 1879 when the Gale family, big landowners in the region, opened a guest house on their working farm. A fire in 1915 destroyed the building, and the Gales constructed a larger one on the site the next year. The building, five stories with white-clapboard siding and a 280-foot veranda, was smaller than other grand hotels, earning the title of "Baby Grand." The Eagle Mountain House was equipped with a sprinkler system — probably assuring its survival while dozens of other grand hotels succumbed to catastrophic fires.

In 1931, the Gales' son, Arthur, (whose stern visage is captured in a portrait hang-

ing so a big draw for families, who visit nearby Story Land, a children's theme park. We encountered a number of Europeans on foliage tours.

As darkness fell, we settled in for what promised to be a hearty meal at the hotel restaurant, Highfield's, where the menu is insistently traditional: Yankee pot roast, broiled haddock, and crab cakes. Kristen ordered the prime rib with baked potato and asparagus; I chose the half chicken with stuffing and root vegetables. I should have gone with her pick, a massive and juicy offering of beef. The chicken was succulent, yet scant on meat and smothered in too much gravy.

A shared dessert of a brownie with vanilla ice cream and hot fudge, though, was a good closer.

and blue carpet extended wall-to-wall. The bathroom, white-tiled and bright, was newly renovated, and as nonsubscribers, we delighted in the hotel's extensive cable offerings.

Come morning, the hotel was feeling comfortably familiar. We were reluctant to leave, and we settled in by the lobby fireplace.

Next to us sat Thomas Dudley, 76, a spry retired New Hampshire lawyer. He was a Dartmouth man, he told us, who had rejected Harvard. His mother had worked at the hotel, he said, and he had visited for his 25th wedding anniversary. He was back to mark the 50th. His wife had found the hotel "sparse," but he said the place for him "was exactly right."

"It's a holdover from long ago," he said.

## Eagle Mountain House

Carter Notch Road, Jackson, N.H.  
603-383-9111; 800-966-5779  
eaglemt.com

**What we liked most:** Sitting in the October sunshine on the veranda after eating waffles topped with maple butter.

**What we liked least:** Inconsistent quality of the menu.

**What surprised us:** The antique elevator and its leisurely pace.

**You know you're at the Eagle Mountain House when...** you can see Carter Notch from the window of your room.

**Rates:** Open year round, with 65 rooms and 30 suites. In season (July 4-Columbus Day weekend, New Year's Day-President's Day weekend) suites are \$189-\$289, rooms \$129-\$229. Off-season, suites are \$79-\$199, rooms \$69-\$149.

**Directions:** Jackson is about 140 miles or three hours from Boston. Take Interstate 95 north to Spaulding Turnpike/Route 16 north at Portsmouth, N.H. Take Route 16 to the junction of Route 302 in Glen. Turn right, remaining on Route 16 north. Turn right at Route 16A, crossing the red covered bridge into Jackson village. After crossing the stone bridge, turn right onto Carter Notch Road. The Eagle Mountain House is on left.

